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SUBJECT: SOMALILAND: ETHIOPIA BROKERS ELECTION IMPASSE
RESOLUTION PROPOSAL

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission, Michael C. Gonzales for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is an action request, please see paras 1, 7, and 8.

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In an August 26 courtesy call with Charge, Ethiopian State Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Tekeda Alemu discussed his August 19-24 trip to Hargeisa, Somaliland in which he attempted to broker a resolution to the elections impasse between the ruling and opposition political parties. Tekeda reported that in close coordination with the UK Embassy he succeeded in securing all parties' agreement to task a panel of experts to "clean up" the voter registry and, if necessary, defer elections until a revised registry can be put to use for more credible elections. Tekeda argued that while the parties were agreed in principle to an Ethiopia-developed non-paper, it remains for the UK to continue to work with the parties on the details before the agreement is finalized, perhaps in early-September. Tekeda expressed significant concern that all parties in Somaliland had shown a loss of confidence in their ability to get through the current electoral crisis without the involvement of outsiders, potentially rendering Somaliland less stable and vulnerable to extremist influence. Dr. Tekeda made a very strong push for the United States, along with the UK, to support substantively current efforts to overcome the Somaliland political crisis, specifically by witnessing the signing of the agreement by the parties in Somaliland. It appears that Tekeda presumably factored in increased involvement by the UK and the U.S. in his efforts to secure an agreement, although it is not clear at this point that Tekeda's spin corresponds to the UK's view. We are seeking the UK Embassy's own comments. Post requests guidance on how to respond to Dr. Tekeda's clear push for an active U.S. role in witnessing any potential signing ceremony as well as to playing a potentially increasing role with the Somaliland parties. End Summary.

A FLAWED VOTER REGISTRY AND AN ENTRENCHED PRESIDENT

¶2. (C) Dr. Tekeda opened the discussion by noting that Somaliland President Kahin Riyale was mistaken by thinking that he could go forward with elections without using the newly developed voter registry, especially given that the parliament explicitly decided just last year that such a registry shall be used for the next round of national elections. The president's decision prompted significant mistrust among the opposition in the president and seriously

politicized the issue of the registry. Tekeda argued that while all parties agreed that the registry was faulty, the opposition could not convince their supporters to go along with delaying the September 27 elections. Once President Riyale posed the options of going forward with elections on time but without a registry, or deferring the elections and start over in developing a new registry, the parties reached an impasse.

ETHIOPIA'S NON-PAPER SOLUTION

13. (C) It was against this background that the Ethiopian Government (GoE) drafted a non-paper -- vetted through the UK Embassy in Addis Ababa -- to propose to the Somalilanders. Tekeda argued that neither a caretaker government or government of national unity model would be permitted by Somaliland's constitution or be supported by the parties. As such, he said that the non-paper sought to depoliticize the issue of the voter registry by subjecting the registry to a panel of experts who would "clean" the registry. The non-paper proposed an approach whereby the timetable for holding the elections would be determined by the period required by the experts to clean the registry. Tekeda acknowledged that the opposition found it difficult to sell this option to their supporters, but he also called the opposition's initial disagreement with the proposal "beyond logic." With strong UK support and engagement, Tekeda asserted, opposition leaders were finally convinced of the approach and agreed to it in a final meeting among the senior leaders and deputies of each party around August 24. Tekeda

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explained that while the experts would certainly have to address the major problems with the registry, they would also have to be politically astute enough to do so in timely enough manner to move forward with the elections before opposition parties' frustration with the delays again erupted. He explained that the non-paper permits the work of the experts to determine the re-scheduling of the elections, if necessary. While he suggested that an expeditious process completed before September 27 could allow the elections to be held on time, he made clear his doubt that such a truncated time was realistic.

INTERPEACE AND THE NEC

14. (C) Tekeda argued that the staff of Interpeace, the Swiss NGO which has developed the voter registry at a cost of \$10 million, were "arrogant" toward President Riyale, which prompted the president to expel them from Somaliland. Tekeda acknowledged that Riyale too was "emotional" in his reaction to Interpeace and the registry it developed. Tekeda also argued that the Somaliland National Electoral Council (NEC) "made a fool of itself" when it supported Riyale's decision to go forward with the elections without the registry. Still, he argued emphatically that "the NEC is a state institution" and it would have been "impossible" for it to side with an NGO against a government institution. Tekeda noted that it would be important to strengthen the NEC -- including through the consideration of all stakeholders, including civil society representatives, the political opposition, the House of Elders, and others. At the same time, Tekeda was emphatic that "whatever is done with the NEC must be in line with the constitution and should respect the laws of the country."

MOVING FORWARD

15. (C) Dr. Tekeda acknowledged that the non-paper to which the parties agreed focused on principles, but still needed to be fleshed out with details -- a task he claimed would remain for the UK to complete over the coming two weeks. Noting the apparent critical role of the proposed panel of experts, the

Charge asked how this body is to be chosen. Tekeda asserted that the parties had agreed for the "Friends of Somaliland," in essence the UK, to identify the panel of experts who would address the flaws in the registry. In response to an estimate of the timeframe for completing this process, Tekeda noted that six to eight months would not be surprising. He recognized that the experts would have to be politically sensitive and realistic about how tolerant the opposition parties would be to delays of the elections. At the same time, he argued that there were major shortcomings in the registry that could not be left unaddressed.

CONCERNS ABOUT LOSS OF CONFIDENCE AND PUSHING FOR A U.S. ROLE

16. (C) Dr. Tekeda reiterated at several points in the discussion that he was greatly concerned about the loss of confidence that the Somaliland parties expressed to him about their ability to overcome this crisis and go through with the electoral process on their own without the intervention of outside supporters. Tekeda said that this is a new factor, noting that in the last Somaliland elections each party showed great confidence and adopted aggressive stances, something notably absent from his just-concluded visit. Tekeda observed that the robust presence of extremists in, and passing through Somaliland and argued that a political environment punctuated by a loss of confidence and distracted by a political crisis risks presenting an opportunity for extremists to take advantage of the situation to further destabilize the region.

17. (C) Tekeda made a very strong and explicit push for the United States to play an increased direct role to support the current process until the elections are held. He argued that "if we are serious about contributing to peace and stability in the region, we need to be more serious about helping them." In particular, Dr. Tekeda pushed for the United States to witness the signing of the agreement by the parties, presumably in Hargeisa, in September, along with the UK. Tekeda also highlighted that the process of

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operationalizing this initial agreement into a specific agreement to be signed, as well as the implementation of that agreement, would likely require intensive shuttle diplomacy.

COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST

18. (C) While the roadmap laid out in the Ethiopian non-paper does present a potentially positive solution to a political crisis, we are hearing suggestions that the Somaliland opposition parties may not be fully on board even with this framework of principles. We have also heard reports of at least some opposition dissatisfaction with how supportive the non-paper and Dr. Tekeda have been of President Riyale's position over the positions of the opposition. The Ethiopians likely do share our interests in a peaceful election and avoiding a crisis in Somaliland. At the same time, they certainly also are remaining mindful of their own domestic equities as they prepare for elections in 2010. It appears that Tekeda factored in increased external, specifically UK and U.S., involvement in his efforts to reach an agreement, and of course may well have discussed this possibility with one or all of the Somaliland parties. It is not yet clear, however, that Dr. Tekeda's version of the reported close UK collaboration in developing the proposed solution, nor the specifics regarding increased UK and U.S. involvement necessarily parallels UK views. The British Ambassador is currently absent on leave, but we are seeking comments from the Charge, who Tekeda asserted was in close contact throughout his negotiations, and will report these septel. Regardless, though, the GoE quite clearly would like an early response regarding what role the United States is willing to play to help resolve the current crisis in Somaliland, and particularly whether we would witness the

formal signing of a formal agreement among the parties and
the Embassy requests guidance. End Comment.
MEECE